



## The Powell Manifesto and the Revolution by and for the Rich

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We all feel the seemingly oppressive impact of the conservative force that has taken over the United States, but feel hard-pressed to identify where it started and the specific entities responsible. Most of us suspect that it was no accident. We can be most certain that it isn't.

Most of us attaining maturity in the 1960s remember with some fondness the progressive wave awash in America after World War Two. Prosperity was with us. The middle class was surging. Consumers were spending. Into the 1960s and 1970s, government action on behalf of citizens, consumers and workers seemed irrepressible.

But it swept resentment, even anger amongst multi-millionaires who felt unappreciated and maligned. Those who controlled companies like Koch Industries and Olin Corporation were being cited by the newly created Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for ravaging our environment. Powerful young titans like Charles and David Koch and John Olin were aghast about what was happening with protesters of the Viet Nam War. Corporations and their leaders were being slighted in the media. Still corporations were profiting, **more** than sharing the growing productivity. Irregardless, most top executives felt beleaguered and unappreciated.

The conservative counterattack against progressivism perhaps started with a somewhat private declaration, even a secret manifesto, though a memo in form, written by Lewis Powell in 1971. Powell was to be nominated to the Supreme Court a few weeks later by President Nixon. At the time, as a corporate lawyer, he was a member of the boards of 11 corporations. The memo was entitled "Confidential Memorandum: Attack of American Free Enterprise System" and was addressed to the chairman of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Education Committee.

Powell considered it a matter of education, for he focused on all realms of communication, technology, politics, and institutions, including new institutional approaches to secretly inculcate

conservative principles and thinking in all areas of American life and culture. Called the Powell Manifesto, it is the antithesis of the *Communist Manifesto* written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. Marx's and Engels' manifesto summarized the class struggle of capitalism versus the worker.

But the Powell Manifesto was far more effective in implementing a conservative revolution in America than the *Communist Manifesto* was in fighting capitalism, mainly due to the immense financial resources of the corporate class and the existing American institutions that could be molded to conservative will through immense sums of money. Early on, right-wing ideology was fabricated and controlled by a small cadre of foundations like Smith Richardson, Adolph Coors, Lynd and Harry Bradley, and John M. Olin. Richard Mellon Scaife and his Carthage Foundation proved to be the most prodigious at the time.

The *Communist Manifesto* spoke of a more intellectual material change – a dictatorship of the proletariat — while the Powell Manifesto laid out a secret plan to achieve a substantive change that corporate chieftains desired, a change that twisted existing government and molded invented institutions into tools of their own agenda.

At the time, it was the practice of the rich to shelter themselves from taxes by setting up their own legal charitable foundations with few government controls. Set up by legislation, they had to donate at least 5% of their assets yearly to nonprofit organizations, enabling dramatic reductions in taxable income. This led to private foundations, actually hyper-partisan think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, Carthage Foundation, Cato Institute and so on. They radically changed the way leaders and the citizenry in all realms viewed the conservative culture. It was no tiny effort. By 2013 some \$800 billion dollars was applied to the effort through over 100,000 foundations.

Today's young missed the gradual transformation that took place, knowing only the radical results we have today with conservatism controlling media, thinking, and leadership. At any rate the historical path witnessed President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society in the 1960s with his war on poverty and racial injustice radically deterred by the 1980s. By then conservative social engineering had changed opinion to an anti-government bias which President Ronald Reagan was most emboldened to declare: "Government is not the solution to our problem: government is the problem."

Reagan, in fact, boldly distributed the right-wing Heritage Foundation's policy playbook, *Mandate for Leadership*, to every member of Congress. Of the 1,270 specific policy proposals, Reagan adopted 61% of them, things like curtailed environmental regulations, cutting taxes for the rich, and cutting social programs. Joining the conservative *mind meld*, we – Reagan and most public officials — went from government programs to help the poor to, in effect, mass incarceration of the poor, especially minorities by supporting "tough on crime and drugs" legislation.

How did this happen? Conservatives led a cultural revolution – their own form of a tyrannical Big Brother — through their hyper-partisan think tanks in an organized effort that had an impact far beyond Washington. Their relentless attacks transformed thinking in the realms of government regulation, climate change, taxes, poverty programs, drugs, and crime. Keynesian economics was replaced by supply-side economics with a *laissez-faire* philosophy, the latter, of course, favoring crony capitalism.

Rich moguls took to heart the Powell Manifesto which outlined specifics on how to achieve the revolution and the thousands of think tanks did research and spent accordingly. The Chamber of Commerce was funded with staffs of scholars in social sciences who authored widely published screeds on conservative thinking. A staff of speakers articulated the product in public forums.

A speaker's bureau gathered the finest business minds to spread the word. Textbooks were formulated and published. The chamber insisted on equal time on campus speaking circuits. University faculty was balanced in their philosophy. The chamber of commerce plan would have great rapport with graduate schools of business. National television networks would be monitored. Court appointments would be steered to conservative thinking at all cost. Liberal-attack books were written by right-wing figures like Ann Coulter with their popularity reportedly buoyed by large purchases for free distribution by right-wing organizations.

All facets of the Powell Manifesto have spread like the plague. One of the most important was political. Conservatism's massive support was exerted in 2000 to get George W. Bush appointed president by the Supreme Court. Conservatism needed to continue the tax cuts for the rich that Reagan started. They needed to emasculate the EPA. They needed to weaken restrictions on Wall Street. Through the Bush administration they could get money in their hands through lower taxes, privatization of the military, reduced social spending and much less regulation. To cement the discourse against government, his cavalier staff appointments and his reckless performance dismissed the domestic importance of government, making its incompetence a fact, at least in his administration.

At the state level we've seen GOP control of many state governments weaken unions, promote privatization, shred environmental restrictions, disenfranchise minority voters and exert total control. The American Legal Exchange Council (ALEC), supported by a host of Fortune 500 companies, even writes legislation for many of the same states, which follows the dictates of rich corporations like Koch Industries and Exxon-Mobil. And the Supreme Court did its job as well – stripping voting rights, making money central in elections and emasculating consumer and union power.

Tools of the Koch brothers like Americans for Prosperity and The Tea Party are the new 501c tax-exempt organizations doing the bidding of billionaires that taxpayers subsidize.

Angry voters who like Donald Trump are only reacting to a drastic change they don't understand. The path to this pro-rich revolution started back in the 1960s when the rich felt they

were under attack. Most Americans do not know the history or the powerful forces that brought the gross inequalities we are now seeing.

But the Powell Manifesto turned out to be much more powerful and much more effective for crony capitalists than the *Communist Manifesto* was for workers. The latter was more of an idea or philosophy. The Powell doctrine came to fruition with the use of obscene, and sometimes fraudulent, profit, mainly through the exploitation of the worker (proletariat), broadened to consumers and the middle class with the Great Recession. American taxpayers even helped to fund it, directly and indirectly, as victims.

That's why the GOP continues to target immigrants and non-whites. You have to have scapegoats.